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THE VISION OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS: ONE NATION UNDER GOD

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ABSTRACT

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The steeples of our nation's churches and synagogues bear witness to the fact that our nation is probably one of the most religious nations on earth. Our inclusion of clergy and religious organizations in many of our civic activities is further witness to our acknowledgement of the importance of religion in community life. This deliberate involvement of religion in local events is rooted deeply in our past, beginning with those English settlers who first arrived in the New World seeking a place to worship God without undue interference from the Crown.

Our founding fathers, endowed with the spiritual values of those early settlers, gave us a new nation based on their vision of God and government. Their vision was one of a secular government openly dependent on the Providence of God for the welfare of both the government and the people. That vision of one nation under God has been maintained by national leaders to a greater or lesser degree for most of our nation's history. The impact of that vision has greatly influenced the political, economic and social direction of our people since the nation's founding.

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INTRODUCTION

We Americans are a patriotic people. We love to wave the flag and proclaim for all the world to hear our love for God and country. Because of this, old veterans squeeze themselves into ill-fitting uniforms, shoulder ancient M-1 rifles and strut down main street as color guards in the annual hometown Memorial Day and Independence Day parades. As the parade moves toward the local city park, the citizens all congregate along the curb to cheer the old soldiers and the flag. Gathering in the park we listen to boring speeches by current and "wanna be" elected officials, play softball, drink beer and swap war stories about military days long in the past. As the sun begins to set we close the day with the singing of patriotic hymns such as *God Bless America* and *My Country 'Tis of Thee*. A local pastor offers a prayer for the nation and we finish the day off with a rousing display of fireworks. We go home feeling proud to be Americans and feeling like we are surely God's chosen people.

Why do we mix hymns and prayers with our national holiday celebrations? In a nation which, on the surface, appears more secular than religious, one might easily ask why Americans insist on mixing religion with patriotic events. How is it that we invoke God's blessing on town hall meetings and high school athletic events? It is because we are a nation of religious people with a strong heritage of faith in and awareness of the Almighty in our land.

Americans have always been, Justice William Douglas repeatedly pointed out in the Supreme Court opinions he wrote on church-state relations in the 1950's, a "religious people". Religion played an important part in Europeans migrating to the New World. Religion was a major factor in the movement that led to the Revolutionary War and to the Declaration of Independence which declared the United States of America to be a free and independent nation.

The First Amendment to the Constitution specifically guaranteed "free expression of religion".¹

How did we become what Justice Douglas called a "religious people"? We were, from our nation's very beginning a people with a deeply imbedded religious bent. In the earliest days of the colonial experience in America Puritanism in New England was practiced in the church, taught in the school and lived at home. Religious pluralism was practiced in New York and encouraged among the Quakers of Pennsylvania. Catholics were predominant in Maryland and Anglicans of the Church of England was the established church of neighboring Virginia. The common thread running through the colonies was that of an active, acted-upon religious faith.²

BEGINNINGS

In seventeenth century America one of the church's avowed purposes was education. That education focused on the propagation of the Gospel and the strengthening of denominational prerogatives in given locations. Thus were born bitter rivalries and intolerance among various church groups throughout the thirteen colonies. Each denomination eyed the others with hostility and suspicion. Violence among "the brethren" was not unknown.³

By the middle of the eighteenth century, thanks largely to the "Great Awakening" of 1720-1760, religious tolerance had largely overcome the hostility of the previous century. Additional denominations had arisen from the era of revivalism and Americans found it more profitable to cooperate than to argue. Only the existence of established denominations supported by civil authorities in some colonies prevented the practice of religious freedom throughout the land.⁴ This tolerance and harmony, along with the good it brought to local communities was not lost on those who became the founders and leaders of the United States.⁵

The political leaders, realizing that Christian faith promoted moderation in all things and

was the bulwark of decency in the community, became a religiously tolerant group. Although the Church of England was the established Church in Virginia, Catholics, Quakers, Huguenots and other "decent Christians" were tolerated. Quakers and Catholics were even elected to the House of Burgesses. Among those preaching and practicing religious tolerance among the colonies was George Washington, who was an Anglican vestryman from Virginia.⁶

Thus the new republic which first saw light of day in Philadelphia in July 1776 represented the religious values of men who were raised from the cradle to manhood on a diverse diet of religious faith. That faith, however expressed, derived from Old World beginnings and filtered through their New World experience, formed a value system which the members of the Continental Congress drew upon as they gave us the Declaration of Independence.⁷

BIRTH OF THE NATION

As the Continental Congress sat in session in the spring of 1776 to consider how to deal with the behavior of an arrogant English king and his court, few delegates had seriously considered declaring the thirteen colonies an independent nation. The goal of those assembled was to come to amicable terms with the mother country. However, on June 7, 1776, delegate Richard Henry Lee, acting on instructions from the government of Virginia, introduced a resolution calling upon the Continental Congress to issue a declaration of independence. The Congress elected John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Thomas Jefferson to prepare the document. The document was to claim nationhood and independence for the colonies under international law. The five men met, discussed the proposed form of the declaration and appointed Jefferson to prepare the first draft. On July 2, 1776, Congress approved the final draft and declared the colonies independent of England. The drafters of the Declaration of Independence

saw themselves creating, not a secular government, but a government under God's law. God was invoked to watch over the new nation.⁸

Our founding fathers were keenly aware of the principle that faith and freedom go together. Freedom cannot survive without faith in God. The signers of the Declaration of Independence stated, "We therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions...solemnly publish and declare that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states...And for the support of this declaration, with firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."⁹

The appeal to the "Supreme Judge of the World" for the "protection of Divine Providence" and "sacred honor" were in no way empty phrases. The authors and framers of the Declaration of Independence seemed convinced that theirs was a just and right cause before God.¹⁰

There is heavy evidence of the influence of John Locke in the wording of the Declaration. Locke, a fervent Christian and enlightened thinker, had impacted all of the committee who met to draw up the document. Locke's language and political ideas are scattered throughout. Drawing on Locke and their own Christian faith, the writers produced a revolutionary document whose power came from its clear appeal to the Almighty for affirmation and protection.¹¹ It is clear that, contrary to the popularity of today's secular approach to government, our founding fathers had a strong religious faith and translated that faith to their strategic vision of what their new nation should become: a nation secular in operation but strongly impacted by the religious faith of the

electorate.

The men who were members of the Continental Congress which met in Philadelphia were an eclectic group religiously. In view of their varied religious backgrounds and the intolerance of the early days of colonization, it would seem surprising that a group of men, each of whom held strong religious convictions, could work in such harmony as they demonstrated. Their harmony impacted the birth of our nation, its ensuing history, and its strategy for generations to come.¹²

Having pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor, those writers and signers of the Declaration of Independence now had to defend their decision by force of arms. Again their dependence was as much upon their religious faith as upon the force of assembled arms. Each officer and soldier of the newly-raised Continental Army should now realize, George Washington intoned in General Orders announcing the Declaration of Independence, that "the peace and safety of this nation depends under God solely on the success of arms."¹³ Apparently, Washington, realizing that his Army was short of all the essentials needed for success, determined to rely as much on God as on material provisions for success.

THE FOUNDING FATHERS

Who were those men of great courage and unshakable spiritual faith who brought our nation into being? They were an odd assortment, three of whom are probably representative. The dour John Adams, little known for religious fervor, acknowledged his own deep sense of dependence on God when he wrote to his wife Abigail:

The second day of July 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated as a day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with shows,

games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward, forevermore.¹⁴

Adams was a man quietly but deeply devoted to Christ. In his early adulthood he had struggled with whether to become a pastor or a lawyer. Diary entries show a deep and vigorous wrestling with a call to ministry. Even after opting for law over ministry, he kept open the possibility of becoming a minister, seeing a pastoral vocation as representing in its clearest form a commitment to a virtuous life. There is clear evidence of a life-long desire to offer service to Christ, the Church and his fellow citizens. He carried into his secular vocation, and to the Continental Congress, the moral obligations and self-imposed expectation of a New England pastor.¹⁵ Such quiet faith was instrumental in establishing an American tradition of sending men with deep spiritual convictions to serve in positions of great responsibility in the national government. His renown apparently lay not in a hail fellow well met personality, but rather in a deep assurance that God is Master of all things, including the future of his new nation.

Adam's close associate and one-time dear friend Thomas Jefferson was cut from different cloth. Jefferson would never identify himself as a Christian in the orthodox sense, but his faith in, and reliance upon, God was deeply imbedded in the man. He strongly believed in religious authority and Christian conscience. The world had not been created and abandoned to chance. He held that the universe had been created by a divine Creator who had created a common humanity and the natural sociability of mankind. His religious faith was a cohesive force in his world view.¹⁶ It was this faith which accompanied Jefferson to the Continental Congress and seemed to be very much a part of him as he drafted the Declaration of Independence. This is borne out in his appeal to "Creator" and "Divine Providence".

Jefferson was soundly convinced that secular freedom and religious freedom were essential to each other. It was not simply a symbiotic relationship. "Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure," he once asked, "when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?"¹⁷

Benjamin Franklin is another of the founding fathers whose religious faith and practice had a permanent impact on the founding and future of the United States. Because of his scientific endeavors and inquiry he was often labeled an atheist by the religious leaders of his day. His unorthodox religious practices did little to allay the suspicions of the good reverends of Philadelphia. He was a Presbyterian early on and later joined the Episcopalian Church. He held strongly to the belief that there was good in even the worst religion and that good works were far more important, in the sight of God, than cold orthodoxy. In his *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion* he penned the following prayer:

O wise God, my good Father!

Thou beholdest the sincerity of my heart and of my devotion;
grant me a continuance of thy favor!

1. O Creator, Father! I believe that thou art good, and that thou art pleased with the pleasure of thy children. Praised be thy name forever!

2. By thy power hast thou made the glorious sun, with his attending worlds; from the energy of thy mighty will, they first received their prodigious motion, and by thy wisdom hast thou prescribed the wondrous laws by which they move. Praised be thy name forever!

3. By thy wisdom hast thou formed all things. Thou hast created man, bestowing life and reason, and placed him in dignity superior to thy other worldly creatures. Praised be thy name forever!

4. Thy wisdom, thy power, and thy goodness are everywhere clearly seen; in the air and in the water, in the heaven and on the earth; thou providest for the various winged fowl, and the innumerable inhabitants of the water; thou givest cold and heat, rain and sunshine,

in their season, and to the fruits of the earth increase. Praised be thy name forever!

5. Thou abhorrest in thy creatures treachery and deceit, malice revenge, intemperance and every hurtful vice; but thou art lover of justice and sincerity, of friendship and benevolence, and every virtue. Thou art my friend, my father and my benefactor. Praised be thy name forever! Amen.¹⁸

This is hardly the prayer of an atheist. Such faith as this, simple and childlike, was the foundation upon which our nation was built and which still impacts Americans today.

Almost every man who participated in the founding of our nation during that spring and summer of 1776 was an individual of sound moral convictions and solid religious faith. John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin were but three of the men who served on the committee appointed to draw up the Declaration of Independence. Their religious faith and deeply held desire to do what was best for the American people reflected the moral and religious temperament of the Continental Congress as a whole. They were churchmen, and no prominent citizen could withdraw from churchly institutions, nor from civic duty, for church duties and civic duties were one. It is hard to name a single leader of the Revolutionary period who was not securely within the folds of the Church.¹⁹ There were no secularists here, no doubters, disbelievers, nor atheists. Our nation was indeed laid on a foundation of deep religious faith which was very much a part of the very fabric of life of our founding fathers.

The Constitutional Convention marked another transition point in the founding of our nation. The delegates who met in Philadelphia in 1787 were in many cases the same men who had met eleven years earlier to declare the colonies independent of England.

The delegates seemed determined to lay a governmental foundation which would endure for all time. They understood that their work would be judged by the light of history.²⁰ The men

who convened in Philadelphia to build and publish a constitution formed a distinguished group typical of the top leadership in the nation. Wealthy and well-educated men dominated the membership of the Convention. Forty-four had been, or still were, members of the Continental Congress. Most had been active in the Revolutionary War. Eight had signed the Declaration of Independence. They shared a basic commitment to the concept of a single, unified nation.²¹

Unlike the gathering of the Continental Congress in 1776, which debated and approved the Declaration of Independence in relative harmony, the Constitutional Convention seemed to thrive on argument, dispute, and acrimony.²² Considering the geographical, political, social and economic diversity of the delegates, some disagreement could be expected. It would seem only natural for a New Englander to challenge issues like counting slaves for the population, while southern delegates would take offense at the challenge. Whatever the challenges, whether regional or social, the convention seemed on the verge of disintegrating in bitterness when the venerable Benjamin Franklin intervened. The wise old doctor, drawing on his deep sense of dependence on God, brought order out of chaos and near failure when he challenged the delegates to pause and pray. His appeal to his fellows was to "humbly apply to the Father of Lights" to illuminate their understandings.²³ The assembly paused, prayed for guidance and regained their lost sense of purpose and unity. The Constitutional Convention worked in harmony thereafter. Franklin's appeal to prayer was probably his greatest contribution to the Constitution. Without his timely appeal to call on divine guidance, the delegates might very well have dispersed without a constitution for the struggling young nation.²⁴ Their vision of one nation under god would have died at birth.

Two broad generalizations can be made concerning the religious beliefs of the members of

the Constitutional Convention. All were convinced of the need for religion as an underpinning for republican government, and though some were skeptical toward some of the tenets of Christianity all of them shared belief in the view of reality on which theistic-humanistic values are based.²⁵ They were a group of men who depended on their theistic to evangelical religious beliefs to lead them in establishing a just and good government for the American people.

The founding fathers' conception of human nature was largely derived from the Judeo-Christian belief that human beings are inherently inclined to sin. James Madison, for instance, wrote of the "infirmities and depravities of the human character." Alexander Hamilton contemplated the "folly and wickedness of mankind." Even the unorthodox Jefferson maintained that "in questions of power, let no more be heard of confidence in man but bind him down from mischief in the chains of the constitution."²⁶ Obviously these men placed their faith in some power other than their fellow citizens. They saw the need for a national document of governance at whose core was a strong belief in a divine power.

With varying types and depths of religious faith the founding fathers gave us the Constitution. They were justifiably proud of their document but felt it was incomplete. Belief in original sin led the founders, according to James Madison, to regard government as a necessary check on natural egoism but also to distrust government itself. Checks and balances would be needed. The principal source of restraint on government, the founders were sure, had to be religion. Most of the founders at the same time concluded that, while the spiritual element was essential, government at the national level must be secular. From this conclusion came the Bill of Rights, the First Amendment to our Constitution.²⁷

Ironically the Committee on Postponed Matters voted ten to zero to omit a bill of rights

from the Constitution. This decision proved to be a great liability when the ratification process began. Much criticism from the states focused explicitly on the lack of such a list of popular liberties. The Bill of Rights would become, then, the most cherished part of the Constitution.²⁸

With the new Constitution in place as the legal basis for national being and behavior, the nation elected George Washington as its first President. Washington, farmer, soldier and statesman was also a man of deep spiritual faith. His approach to government was grounded in his Anglican faith. His view of religion and government, as stated by him was:

Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.... The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and cherish them. Whatever may be conceded to the influences of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. 'Tis substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government... Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?²⁹

So our republic was begun, birthed by and based upon the premise that religious faith and moral behavior were the twin cornerstones of responsible and successful government. The impact of religion was indisputably stamped on the government our founding fathers. The question is, has the impact continued?

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

As the United States was in its emerging years, the religious vision of our founding fathers seems to have been shared by the entire nation. Though not all the people accepted or practiced the Judeo-Christian faith of the founders, there is ample evidence that ours was a Godly nation, as discovered by Alexis de Tocqueville.³⁰

De Tocqueville was commissioned by the French government in the early nineteenth

century to travel throughout the United States. His mission was to discover the secret of our country's success in the experiment with democracy. De Tocqueville's report stated: "I do not know whether all Americans have a sincere faith in their religion---for who can know the human heart--- but I am certain that they hold it to be indispensable for the maintenance of republican institutions. This opinion is not peculiar to a class of citizens or to a party, but it belongs to the whole rank of society." America, he added, is "the place where the Christian religion has kept the greatest power over men's souls; and nothing better demonstrates how useful and natural it is to man, since the country where it now has the widest sway is both the most enlightened and the freest."³¹

THE FAMILY FIGHT

As the nation emerged from the War of 1812 people began to look westward. Southerners moving to the west naturally expected to transport the institution of slavery with them. Those who migrated from the northern states disputed the rights of slaveholders to own and use slaves in the territories. As the territories aspired to statehood rivalries between pro- and anti-slavery elements became bitter. The issue of states' rights emerged. Tempers flared. Families divided. Cries for union fell on deaf ears, and the nation split. The result was the Civil War.

Fortunately for Americans---north and south---the religious impact of our founding fathers remained extant. The Civil War was brutal, but it might well have been more so if not for the religious convictions and vision of men like Abraham Lincoln, Stonewall Jackson, and Robert E. Lee.

Abraham Lincoln loathed the very thought of a war between the states. He appealed to all Americans for patience and reason. In the last paragraph of his first inaugural address he said,

"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection."³² His great heart's desire was to maintain that union established through the vision of the founding fathers.

Lincoln was a man of deep spiritual faith. Demonstrating the depth of his dependence on the Almighty, he established the last Thursday of 1861 as a day of humiliation, prayer and fasting, asking the nation to "humble ourselves before Him and to pray for his mercy, ---to pray that we may be spared further punishment, though most justly deserved; that our arms may be blessed and made effectual for the re-establishment of law, order, and peace, through out the wide extent of our country; and that the inestimable boon of civil and religious liberty, earned under His guidance and blessing, by the labors and sufferings of our fathers may be restored in all its original excellence."³³

It bothered Lincoln that the war was not brief. Yet as soldiers and families on both sides suffered and as his own capitol was threatened, Mr. Lincoln's faith held firm. He wrote that, "The will of God prevails...I am almost ready to say this is probably true, that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet."³⁴ While the end of the war was yet three years in the future, President Lincoln's vision of God at work in America was in no way diminished.

While the Civil War years were years of often great spiritual fervor and revivalism among both armies fighting the war, Mr. Lincoln needed his faith to handle a presidential cabinet which demonstrated very little of the religious vision of the founding fathers. The cabinet's overriding goal was the defeat of the southern states and the imposition of a harsh, retributive military government of reconstruction. The President's appeal for reason and compassion with regard to the southern kinsmen fell on deaf ears.³⁵ There appeared to be very little of the founding fathers'

spirit in the vitriolic Lincoln cabinet.

The south produced a leader who had been formed in the mold of the Revolutionary War-era visionaries who set the tone and pattern of American government. Robert E. Lee, the son of one of the leaders of the Virginia independence movement, was a man of strong Christian character. Arguably, no other American military leader has ever demonstrated greater self-sacrifice or been so revered by his troops as Lee. Gamaliel Bradford says of General Lee: "A devout Christian himself, he thought of each soldier in his army as a soul to be saved and in every way he encouraged mission and revival work, Even in the midst of urgent duty he would stop and take part in a camp prayer meeting...."³⁶ Stonewall Jackson, himself a great Christian, while dying, said of Lee, "Better that ten Jacksons should fall than one Lee."³⁷

Robert E. Lee did not lead his army to win the Civil War. Despite his military genius and leadership skills, he lost. It was possibly in losing that we see the real impact of our nation's spiritual heritage on the man. He became convinced that, once the war was lost, the south must be re-integrated into the federal union with as little rancor as possible on either side. When his leaders wanted to continue the fight in April 1865 his response was, "I appreciate that the surrender of this army is , indeed, the end of the Confederacy. But that result is now inevitable, and must be faced. And as Christian men, we have no right to choose a course from pride or personal feelings. We have simply to see what we can do best for our country and people."³⁸ General Robert E. Lee never lost sight of the claims of God upon his life, and he never betrayed the spiritual heritage passed on to him by the founders of his nation.

General Ulysses Grant was another leader whose religious values impacted the nation, north and south. Grant could have required any retribution he wished of Lee when they met at

Appomatox Court House. The magnanimous Grant, in his leniency toward Lee and the southerners no doubt did more to begin the healing than any army of politicians could have done.³⁹

Despite having to work with a mean-spirited, vindictive cabinet, President Lincoln was able, by virtue of his religious faith to see the nation through to victory. His most able and respected military commander, U.S. Grant bore witness to Lincoln's faith through his own magnanimity toward the defeated Robert E. Lee and the vanquished Confederates. The religious legacy of the nation's founders was still very much in evidence in those strategic leaders.

INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Not all of America's leaders have valued the religious heritage of our earliest leaders. After the Civil War ended there was a period of moral fog in American government as the leaders pursued what they saw as America's destiny. It was not until after the death of President William McKinley that a spiritual renewal took place in government. The renewal came through the agency of Theodore Roosevelt as he succeeded the slain McKinley. He brought our country into the twentieth century politically and religiously.

Theodore Roosevelt was a patrician New Yorker, a high-church Episcopalian, a scholar and a dedicated Christian. He believed in accepting responsibility---as an individual or as a nation--before God. To him greatness demanded responsibility. As America's leaders argued over whether to enter World War I on the side of Britain, the former President wrote:

We are the citizens of a mighty Republic consecrated to the service of God above, through the service of man on this earth. We are the heirs of a great heritage bequeathed to us by statesmen who saw with the eyes of the seer and the prophet. We must not prove false to the memories of the nation's past.⁴⁰

in keeping with the religious vision of the nation's founders.

Following Theodore Roosevelt was Woodrow Wilson, whose faith in God was paramount in all his government ventures. Born the son of a Presbyterian minister, Wilson learned early the values of Christian duty, charity and discipline. As President of the United States he stated that "America was born a Christian nation; America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelation of Holy Scripture."⁴⁰

A man of great idealism, based on his strong Calvinist upbringing, Mr. Wilson saw the United States as a "city on a hill," beckoning the world to freedom based on his solid Judeo-Christian values.⁴¹ He obviously saw himself as the keeper of the ideals and vision expressed by Jefferson, Adams and the other founding fathers.

Douglas MacArthur became Chief of Staff of the Army in 1930 when the country was in a slide into the Great Depression. Even though war was beginning to brew in Europe, our own government was cutting defense forces as a money-saving measure. Alarmed at the apparent blindness of both Congress and the White House to the impending conflict, the general, with the encouragement of most of the nation's clergy, wrote, "Perhaps the greatest privilege of our country, which indeed was the genius of its foundation, its religious freedom. To render our country helpless would invite destruction, not only of our economic and political freedom, but also of our religious." He reinforced this point by quoting the words of Jesus in Luke 11:21, "When a strong man armed, keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." He concluded by saying, "I confidently believe that a red-blooded and virile humanity which loves peace devoutly, but is willing to die in defense of the right is Christian from center to circumference."⁴² Probably none of our nation's founders could have expressed it better. However, the nation slumbered on with no

discernable spiritual or strategic vision even as Europe was collapsing.

THE RELIGIOUS VISION DURING WORLD WAR II

As World war II became a reality it was the blustery, plain spoken George Patton, Jr. who oddly enough embodied many of the moral and religious values cherished by the men who declared our independence at Philadelphia and suffered at Valley Forge. Writing to his subordinate commanders he once stated, "It is my firm conviction that the great success attending the hazardous operations carried out on sea and land by the Western Task Force could only have been possible through the intervention of Divine Providence manifested in many ways."⁴³

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was admired by many and reviled by more than a few during his tenure as President of the United states. For all of his political guile and machinations, he was a national leader who drew deeply and frequently from his well of religious faith. This was especially true during the long days of World war II. He was elated with the early successes of the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944. His spiritual leadership was displayed without any trace of affectation on the evening of the Normandy landings as he prayed on a nationally broadcast prayer service. He prayed for "our sons, pride of our Nation....Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith. They will need Thy blessings. Their road will be long and hard. For the enemy is strong. He may hurl back our forces. Success may not come with rushing speed, but we shall return again and again..."⁴⁴ His prayer was that of a supplicant seeking God's blessing for his nation, not unlike the aged Dr. Franklin invoking his colleagues to pray for God's blessing at the Constitutional Convention in 1787. There is no record of any President offering public prayer for god's guidance for our country since the Mr. Roosevelt's prayer of June 1944.

THE VISION AFTER VICTORY

As the nation finally concluded World War II following the sudden death of President Roosevelt, the mantle of leadership fell onto the shoulders of the feisty Harry Truman.

Harry Truman could not lay claim to a patrician background such as FDR had enjoyed. He was a farmer, a blue collar product of western Missouri. And he was honest. Honesty was ingrained in Harry Truman. He was honest in his work, his relationships, and he was honest about himself. He was simple, unpretentious and hard-working.⁴⁵

Truman's values were reinforced by his Baptist faith. His religious faith and love for country blended into his creed of "doing right" by all people as well as his nation.⁴⁶

It was Mr. Truman's seeking what was best for the country that led him to relieve the popular Douglas MacArthur in 1951. It was unquestionably the most unpopular act of his Presidency, but he saw it as the proper thing to do. Truman could have humiliated the popular general if he had wished to do so. It was his religious values and his vision of what was right as an American leader, though, which kept him from rubbing the general's nose in the dirt. To further embarrass the great military leader would not have been "doing right." Religious values and vision won out over vindictiveness.⁴⁷ President Truman, for all his short-comings had a religious vision of where the country was supposed to direct itself, and he determined to follow the vision.

His courage of coming to the defense of South Korea in 1950 was drawn from his vision of the nation fulfilling the role of the Good Samaritan. His greatest short-coming was allowing the moral pragmatists within his Administration to chip away at the spiritual values of the nation. Fear of communism and increasing dependence on nuclear power as the "great arbitrator" started the nation on its seemingly irreversible journey away from the vision of our founding fathers as a

nation under God.⁴⁸

President Eisenhower began his first term of office by announcing to his cabinet that cabinet meetings would always begin with silent prayer. On some occasions a cabinet member would offer an audible prayer, but the meetings commenced with prayer, whether silent or audible. The President's boyhood-instilled faith was still a part of him as he became leader not only of our nation, but leader of the free world.⁴⁹

He was highly sensitive to the moral climate of his Administration. He held cabinet members and agency chiefs to an extremely high moral standard, and initiated or encouraged investigations of wrong-doing. He was determined to move the country back to a moral climate based on a traditional Judeo-Christian ethical base.⁵⁰ His sense of history and his West Point tradition of duty, honor, country apparently convinced Mr. Eisenhower that the vision of the founding fathers was still a valid strategy for our nation. He seemed determined to retain the vision of founding fathers of one nation under god.

The moral and religious torch bearer for the Eisenhower government was his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. More than anyone since Woodrow Wilson, Dulles approached the responsibilities of government from the vantage point of the founding fathers. He did so with the whole-hearted support of President Eisenhower.⁵¹ Like Woodrow Wilson, Dulles was the son of a Presbyterian pastor. His religious faith was a source of moral nourishment and the foundation his political views.⁵²

Secretary of State Dulles was happy in his faith and loved his country. Preaching in his father's church in Watertown, New York in October 1953, he made these comments:

We sought through conduct, example and influence to promote

everywhere the cause of human freedom. Through missionaries, educators, physicians, and merchants, the American people carried their ideas and ideals to others. They availed of every opportunity to spread the gospel of freedom, their good news, throughout the world. That performance so caught the imagination of the peoples of the world that everywhere men wanted for themselves a political freedom which could bear such fruits. The despotisms of the last century faded away largely under the influence of that conduct and example. There is no despotism in the world which can stand up against the impact of such a gospel. That needs to be remembered today. Our best reliance is not more and bigger bombs but a way of life which reflects religious faith.⁵³

Dulles not only saw himself as a keeper of the vision of the founding fathers: he wanted to export his vision to the world.

There is little evidence that the American government has had a religious vision or any interest in having religion impact government since the close of the Eisenhower era.

THE DIMMING OF THE VISION

John F. Kennedy stormed into the White House with his Camelot administration vowing to change the world. He immediately put into place a system of government based, not on moral or religious values, but on quantitative analysis.⁵⁴ If an event or issue could not be quantified or justified through analysis it had neither relevance nor value. Kennedy's government functioned on facts, not rhetoric, argument nor allusions to ethics, morality, nor religion.⁵⁵

When Lyndon Johnson assumed the office of President following the assassination of President Kennedy, he retained the entire Kennedy cabinet. There was no change in moral nor ethical climate. Religion had a small place in social rhetoric but little place in governmental functioning. Mr. Johnson was too enamored with establishing his "Great Society" to be bothered with a government concerned with any strategy or vision not focused on his own great society strategy.⁵⁶ He once even expressed a vision of an Asian Great Society under American

overwatch.⁵⁷

The Administration of Richard Nixon was a moral copy of the Johnson era: focus on the immediate and the expedient. White House religious services notwithstanding, there was little visible impact of religion on the Nixon Administration.⁵⁸ American government continued to drift away from the religious vision of the founding fathers.

President Jimmie Carter attempted to turn government back to the vision of the nation's founders. His success is questionable. His boundless confidence in the inherent goodness of humanity clashed with the Calvinist view held by Woodrow Wilson and John Foster Dulles, a view which says humanity is basically depraved and incapable of good without God's intervention. Carter's ethic stated that law and government is founded on the Christian ethic that you love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself.⁵⁹ He was fond of quoting Reinhold Niebhur, but apparently the bureaucracies of American government never caught his---nor Niebhur's--vision.

Ronald Reagan entered the White House determined to give religion its "traditional" place in government. He began by advocating the teaching of creationism alongside the theory of evolution in public school science classes. He felt that the biblical story of creation was at least as credible as Darwin's theory. His effort, though, enthusiastic, was not successful.⁶⁰

After losing his effort at teaching creationism in public schools, the President asked Congress to submit a proposed Constitutional amendment to the states permitting prayer in public schools and other public institutions. The proposed amendment had the support of a majority in the Congress, but constant meddling by Senator Jesse Helms wore out the patience of the Senate. The measure failed by a vote of 51-48.⁶¹ There is no evidence that Mr. Reagan attempted to give priority to another attempt to change the Constitution.

One of President Reagan's small, but cherished religious achievements was the broadcasting of religious programs to the communist bloc nations. Early in his first term as President he instructed the Voice of America to begin both Jewish and Christian broadcasts to the communist world. He was very pleased with the broadcasts and made no secret of it, even when opponents of the programming protested.⁶² Apparently he saw the broadcasts as one man's attempt to counter the religious doctrine of what he called the evil empire.

As eager as Mr. Reagan was to promote Judeo-Christian religious values, there is scant evidence that any member of his Administration shared his views on religion and government.

In 1988 the White House and the Presidency passed on to George Bush, a man whose conservatism was suspect to Reaganites. His religious vision was more humanitarian than biblical. Speaking of his religious vision for America, Mr. Bush said, "I take as my guide the hope of a saint: in crucial things, unity---in important things diversity---in all things, generosity."⁶³ He felt that the nation, "proud, free, decent, and civil," knew that material things were of small account. To help with making "better hearts and finer souls" was a worthwhile objective for a President and his nation.⁶⁴ There seems to have been a great deal of decency in the Bush Administration, but very little of the deeply ingrained dependence upon God displayed and firmly adhered to by the founding fathers.

The government of today's United States is the product of moral and religious drift begun during the Truman era and accelerated with the inception of John Kennedy's Camelot and number crunching quantitative analysis. Despite attempts by Presidents Carter and Reagan, there appears to be no sense of moral nor religious direction to contemporary American government. There seems to be something like a missionary zeal on the part of the current national government to

provoke America's religious community to what might be called "righteous wrath." The election of November 1994 appears to give evidence to religious America's unhappiness with government as it is now practiced. With its emphasis on multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-national governance there appears to be little place for the religious vision of our founding fathers. Their vision of government saw those in power as men who feared God and respected the electorate. There is little evidence of such a vision in today's American government: neither of the three branches of government appear to fear God nor have much respect for the doctrines and traditions of church nor synagogue.

Alexis de Tocqueville, writing about American government nearly two hundred years ago stated that, "Religion, which never intervenes directly in the government of American society, should be considered as the first of their political institutions, for although it did not give them the taste for liberty, it singularly facilitates their use thereof."⁶⁵ Most Americans still want to believe the truth of Tocqueville's statement, as evidenced by the groundswell of interest in religion in America. We want a democratic government, not driven by institutional religion, but impacted by it. Today's government appears to be somewhere between tepidly considerate of religion and indifferent to it.

America today seems to be characterized by a government which is supportive of, or is silent about, non-traditional family traditions such as never-married heads of households with one or more children and/or same-sex or so-called gender neutral marriages. Family breakdown, juvenile crime, and widespread out of wedlock childbirth is the subject of much debate, but the religious community is largely ignored in the seeking of solutions to these problems. It is the old veterans and young military service members who revere the flag and march in parades today, not

the officials of national government. When America's religious leaders speak out in protest the officials of government appear to be deaf or vigorously defend what many in our country see as the moral and spiritual collapse of our valued institutions.

Bill Bennett, former federal drug czar and Secretary of Education, is one of the very few notables of recent history to attempt to call America back to the vision of the founding fathers. In a recent interview he said, "I'm convinced that efforts aimed at improving people's lives that don't have a moral and spiritual vision are a waste of time. I think religion is the anchor for most people's morality."⁶⁶ Bennett is unabashedly enthusiastic in his mission of calling our country back to the vision of the men of 1776 who saw a nation whose government would be visibly and actually subservient to the impact of Judeo-Christian practices.

CONCLUSION

Our founding fathers had a large vision of government in a secular setting but responsive to the religious principles of the electorate. For nearly two hundred years our national government was effectively impacted by voters who placed God-fearing officials in office. The past thirty five years, however has seen a steady decline in both religious vision and practice in all branches of federal government. Doubtless there are men and women of high religious principle serving in both elective and appointive positions in Washington. Why are their voices not heard?

America's national strategy today displays little or no place for traditional religious values. The current National Security Strategy speaks to such issues of promoting democracy, fighting terrorism, and opposing drug trafficking. But nowhere is there any mention of employing our nation's Judeo-Christian value system as a part of "engagement and enlargement".⁶⁷ There seems to be no religious vision. King Solomon said many centuries ago, "Where there is no vision the

"Where there is no vision the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Our people, and our government, need only to look at the ancient kingdom of Israel to see what happens to a national government that leaves religious vision out of national strategy. Our founding fathers had a vision of a nation dependent upon God, a vision built upon past tradition and future hope. Contemporary America would be wise to return to the vision of the founding fathers and emulate their vision of one nation under God.

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